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Light

... on a
New World

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Property of
Graduate Theological Union

Published for the Bexley Christadelphian Ecclesia by



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VOLUME TWELVE

NUMBER 5

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1991

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Bible Nations —

in History & Prophecy

Editorial

‘When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.’¹

IT MAY SEEM rather surprising to some of our readers that the allocation of the earth to the nations within their boundaries, has long been under the controlling hand of Almighty God, in strict relationship to his people, Israel. In the Song of Moses, to be found in the Book of Deuteronomy chapter 32, Moses declares that the purpose of God is centred upon Israel because they are his chosen people. This was because of the promises that God had made to their fathers, particularly to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God’s intention to establish His Kingdom upon earth lies at the very heart of the True Gospel message, and it will be fulfilled at a time still future, when Jesus Christ returns as King of the World, to reign for God.

It follows, therefore, that the other nations in the world are of consequence in God’s purpose, only in relation to Israel.

‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.’²

Because of their iniquities, God used the nations that surrounded Israel to punish his erring people. It was and still is, a father and son relationship, to the end that his people will one day be at the centre of world rejoicing. Moses concluded his song with prophetic words:

‘Rejoice, O nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people.’³

HIS LAND and HIS PEOPLE! This issue of *Light on a New World* takes a special look at some of the nations who have been instrumental in the purpose of God in

¹Deuteronomy 32.8 (NIV) ²Amos 3.2 ³Deuteronomy 32.43 (NIV)

relation to Israel. Babylon, had a great impact on Israel's life as a nation and became the captor of God's people. But Babylon gave place to other nations in fulfilment of Bible prophecy, and thus testifies to the veracity of the Bible as the Word of God. The Arab nations, many descending also from Abraham, have long been antagonists with Israel, again in fulfilment of the prophetic scriptures. Recent events have served to highlight that the Jews are centre-stage in a great drama which will culminate, we believe, in the return of Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth.

Seen in the light of God's purpose with the earth, the destiny of the nations as set out in the Scriptures, is a fascinating study of prophecy fulfilled and fulfilling and we invite you to read on. But we would also remind you of the inescapable truth, that:

'God has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead.'⁴

THE EDITOR

⁴Acts 17.31

COVER PICTURE

As a silent witness, the ruins of this once magnificent city has stood untouched by human hand. Over the last few years, Saddam Hussein had begun to rebuild some of the area, seeing himself as a latter day king Nebuchadnezzar, who was the original builder. For over 2000 years, they have stood dormant as a testimony to the veracity of the Scriptures. At this moment they stand dormant again, with the frustration of work being the result of the recent conflict in Iraq.

The Nation — Babylon

PRESENT

THE REMAINS OF the ancient city of Babylon are to be found on the eastern bank of the Euphrates river about 51 miles (80 km) south of Baghdad in modern Iraq. This city, famed for its hanging gardens, became the political and religious capital of Babylonia and the empire and civilisation based upon it.

It seems incredible that such a powerful centre could disappear. Only a few historians have had their writings retained to provide a record of the time. Herodotus, a Greek historian, called the 'Father of History,' was travelling and writing about 464-477 BC which was about 100 years after the death of Daniel who, as recorded in the Bible, lived in the area. In his history, Herodotus describes the city having 'broad walls with great and high gates'. This is repeated in various references contained in the Bible. Jeremiah tells of 'the broad walls of Babylon . . . and her high gates.'¹

Daniel records an occasion when the king Nebuchadnezzar was boasting of his achievements:

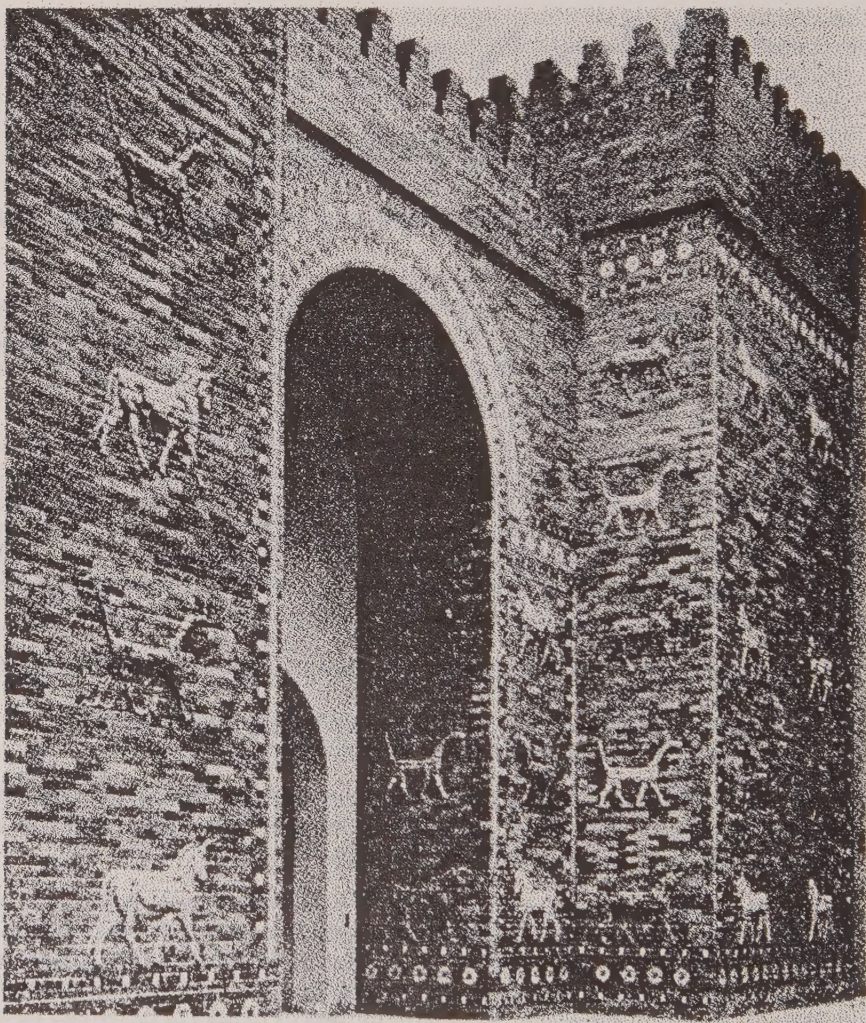
'Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?'²

Yet, so completely did the Babylonian civilization disappear that Herodotus was declared unreliable and the Bible records false because both recorded details of a civilization of which there was no trace until the year AD 19.

In 1850, the archaeologist, Sir Henry Layard (1817-1894), carried out a preliminary dig at Babylon followed by further exploration in 1852 by a French team. Between 1899 and 1917, a systematic excavation of the inner city, led by a German team under R Koldewey, unearthed some of the hidden treasures to show remains of the glory that was once Babylon. More recently, digs by Lenzen in 1956-8 and since 1962 by the Iraqis have included the preservation and restoration of the Ninmah temples.

Despite all the pride of the early builders, the city was destined to be abandoned, to crumble away and decay. All we can do today is resort to reconstructions to glimpse the glory that was once Babylon.

¹Jeremiah 51.61,2 ²Daniel 4.30



A reconstruction of one of the entrance gates to the city can be seen in the East Berlin Museum. It is decorated with over 200 magical beasts like bulls moulded in relief in the brickwork. The bricks were glazed blue with the animals picked out in yellow and brown.

On each of the paving slabs which formed the street from the Ishtar Gate, was written an inscription: 'Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, son of Nabopolassar King of Babylon, am I. The Babel street I paved with Shadn slabs for this procession of the great Lord Marduk. Marduk, Lord, grant eternal life.'



Brick stamped with names and titles of Nebuchadnezzar

Such discoveries provide valuable evidence for modern archaeologists in piecing together the records of the past and, for the Bible student, more confirmation of the Truth of the Scripture is added. It is without dispute that such a civilization existed in the past and we can therefore rely upon the Bible account with confidence to help us learn of the message of salvation that it offers.

It is reported that, in 1978, Saddam Hussein brought in thousands of foreign workers to restore the Ishtar Gate and Nebuchadnezzar's Palace. Saddam has his name stamped on every brick. A vast tourist attraction was planned, but has the Gulf War brought his scheme to an end? Will the foreign workers who fled home ever return?

The Bible has predicted a sad future for the area:

'When thou comest to Babylon and shalt see, and shalt read all these words; then shalt thou say, O Lord, thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off, that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever.'³

³Jeremiah 51.61,2

PAST

The Bible reader will not find the name Iraq in the text, but rather must learn to recognize the older names by which the area was identified: names like Mesopotamia (the land between the rivers), Shinar, Chaldea, Assyria and Babylon. This is where human habitation began. Adam and Eve were placed in a garden, *'eastwards in Eden'*,⁴ through which flowed amongst others the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Though identification of the exact location or extent of the area is not possible, mention of the rivers suggest it was in Southern Iraq. Migration from the Garden was eastwards: *'Cain dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden'*⁵ and built the first city.

Within a few generations, the population grew and farming communities were set up. The discovery of metals and how to use them permitted other developments including music and the arts. Alas, the people forgot their Creator and *'the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose.'*⁶ Such actions displeased God and the Flood was sent to destroy that entire society except for Noah and seven of his family.

When Noah, his sons and his wife and his sons' wives left the Ark⁷ in which they had survived the Flood and walked again on dry ground, they spread out to inhabit the country. Nimrod seized the power of the area and started building:

*'The beginning of his kingdom was Babel (Babylon) and Erech and Accad and Calneh in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur and builded Nineveh and the city of Rehoboth and Calah and Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city.'*⁸

This is the earliest reference to Babylon (Babel) and it was here that the population chose to make a name for themselves instead of worshipping God and to erect their tower *'whose top may reach unto heaven.'*⁹

The construction of a tower, or ziggurat, was to become a feature of important cities of ancient Mesopotamia. They formed an ascending series of temples and focus for worship which was against the declared will of God.

The remedy God chose to stop the construction was the introduction of languages:

*'Let us go down and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel (confusion); because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.'*¹⁰

⁴Genesis 2.8-14 ⁵Genesis 4.16 ⁶Genesis 6.2 ⁷Genesis 8.18 ⁸Genesis 10.10-12 ⁹Genesis 11.4

¹⁰Genesis 11.7-9

Babel was the source, the centre of the aspirations of the 'sons of men' from which they set about producing a culture and a way of living which tried to satisfy all their human desires. Spiritually, God, their Creator, was left out and so it is not surprising to read that the call came to '*Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house unto a land that I will shew thee.*'¹¹

Abram and his relatives were told to leave Mesopotamia with the promise that his name would be great and that through him the whole earth would again be blessed and united.¹²

God chose one family, the chief of whom was Abram, later called Abraham 'father of a great multitude', to leave Babylonia and to settle in the Land of Promise. So it was that Israel and its land was identified and born.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CONFLICT

These early chapters in Genesis describe the truth and foundation of the difficulties and animosity which still exists in the Middle East. In Bible language, it is Babylon against Jerusalem, the kingdoms of men versus the Kingdom of God, the confrontation of apostasy and truth. These conflicts are related throughout Scripture and are very evident in the long and troubled history of the area. Occasionally, Jerusalem has been stronger, but more often Babylon has held the upper hand. The recent Gulf War has highlighted the continuing dislikes with Iraq, whose war was within its own claimed territory, using the opportunity to fire 'Scud' missiles across the desert to land on Israeli targets. The Bible, however, has predicted that '*the time to favour Zion (Jerusalem) will eventually come.*'¹³

The first major war recorded in the Bible was between four kings of the north, including Amraphel King of Shinar (Babylon) and five kings of the southern area around the Dead Sea. The northern group were victorious until they confronted Abraham who recovered from them all the spoils including the release of his nephew Lot and his household. Abraham, the record relates, then presented them all to Melchizedek, king and priest of Salem. So commenced the age-long conflict between Babylon and Jerusalem.¹⁴

ISRAEL'S TRIAL

The Bible record now moves forward 1000 years from Abraham to the time of king David when, as ruler of a united Israel, his territory extended to the banks of the Euphrates river. '*David smote also Hadad-ezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates.*'¹⁵

The river became a natural boundary between the 'Kingdom of God' and the nations of the north. The balance of power on the eastern bank of Euphrates had

¹¹Genesis 12.1 ¹²Genesis 12.2-3 ¹³Psalms 102.13 ¹⁴Genesis 14.1-12, 16-20 ¹⁵II Samuel 8.3

moved northward from Babylon and the empire of Assyria established itself mainly along the banks of the river Tigris with cities such as Nineveh being prominent.

The Babylonian empire was richer and more splendid than the Assyrian and because God was to use them against Israel as a punishment for their wickedness and desertion of His ways, the inspired prophets were sent to warn the people of impending doom and captivity. Jeremiah, in particular, had the unenviable task of warning the inhabitants of Jerusalem that, if they failed to separate themselves from the evils of Babylonian worship, they would be engulfed into the hands of the kingdom from which, many centuries before, they had been taken.

Questions such as this were asked of the prophet:

'Enquire I pray thee of the Lord for us; for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us; if so be that the Lord will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us.'¹⁶

The historical books of the Bible relate the awful terror and suffering the Jews experienced under siege. For 19 years, the Babylonian generals had assaults against Jerusalem, taking kings, princes, priests and families, destroying the temple and burning the city to leave it desolate. It was to Babylon that the victorious Babylonian army brought the Jewish captives. Among these was Jehoiachin, whose captivity there is confirmed by inscriptions found in the ruins of Babylon itself. The plunder from the Temple at Jerusalem brought with the blinded king Zedekiah was stored in the main Temple of the city.

These things had been foretold by the prophets who God sent to warn His wicked people, but with little effect. The captives were deported to Babylonia and used as slaves.

'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away required of us a song and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion . . . Remember O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said Rase it, rase it even to the foundations thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.'¹⁷

THE TIMESCALE

The prophets of Israel had foretold just how long the captivity would last:

'And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment: and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass when seventy years are accomplished that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity and the land of the Chaldeans, and will

¹⁶Jeremiah 21.2 ¹⁷Psalms 137.1-3, 7-9

make it perpetual desolations. And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all nations.¹⁸

Here was justice because Babylon was to be made desolate and repaid for what they had done to Israel and Jerusalem.

‘And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation.’¹⁹

There are several similar prophecies. Babylon was to be overcome and Jeremiah’s forecast states that the destruction would come from the north: *‘Out of the north there cometh up a nation against her which shall make her land desolate and none shall dwell therein.’*²⁰

The prophecy continued:

‘For lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country, and they shall set themselves in array against her. Chaldea shall be a spoil, all that spoil her shall be satisfied, saith the Lord.’²¹

Then in the next chapter:

‘Prepare against her the nations with the kings of the Medes, the captains thereof and all the rulers thereof, and all the land of his dominion. And the land shall tremble and sorrow: for every purpose of the Lord shall be performed against Babylon to make the land of Babylon a desolation without an inhabitant.’²²

Babylon was to fall in its turn and be left a heap of ruins. The prophet Daniel was brought into the Babylonian kings’ banquet the night before these events took place and predicted from the handwriting on the wall the imminent overthrow of Babylon:

‘MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN. God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.’²³

Despite the elevation of Daniel to high office, the record is very brief:

‘In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom. . . .’²⁴

So the head of gold of Nebuchadnezzar’s image, *‘thou art this head of gold’*²⁵ gave way to the empire of the Medes and Persians — the breast and arms of silver of the image. In October 539 BC, the Persians entered Babylon and Belshazzar was killed.

¹⁸Jeremiah 25.11-13 ¹⁹Isaiah 13.19-20 ²⁰Jeremiah 50.3 ²¹Jeremiah 50.9-10

²²Jeremiah 51.28-9 ²³Daniel 5.25-28 ²⁴Daniel 5.30-1 ²⁵Daniel 2.38-40

THE NEW CONQUEROR

During the reign of Cyrus, the Persian king, many Jews returned to Jerusalem, as the prophets predicted. The 70 years captivity ended and under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, many Jews re-settled in their homeland of Palestine.

Babylon was the centre of a number of rebellions and in suppressing them, Xerxes, the Persian ruler, destroyed the city in 478 BC. The campaigns of Alexander the Great established the Greeks as the next dominant power and he planned to restore Babylon, but he met an untimely death there before work had progressed far. With the founding of Seleucia on the river Tigris as the capital city of the Seleucid rulers after the capture of Babylon in 312 BC, the city once again fell into disrepair and ruin.

The Greeks were overthrown by the iron rule of the Romans and the two legs of iron from Nebuchadnezzar's image were planted in two capitals, Rome and Constantinople. The small country of Palestine was occupied by the Romans and it was during this rule that Jesus Christ, *'the king of the Jews'* was born.

This brings us to the times of the New Testament and the power and authority was very much from Rome. Under Roman rule, Jesus Christ spread the Gospel message, but also suffered the dreadful death by crucifixion. The Bible tells of his resurrection and ascension into heaven, awaiting the instruction of the Creator to fulfil the next element in His plan and purpose with this earth.

The fate of the Jews in AD 70 when Jerusalem was captured and desecrated by the invading Roman legions is a further evidence of the promises of God being fulfilled because of neglect and unfaithfulness by His people.

Now 1990 years later, the climax of the confrontation between Babylon and Jerusalem is being prepared.

FUTURE

The Old Testament foretold that ancient Assyria would rise again when the king should come out of Bethlehem to be ruler in Israel: *'And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land.'*²⁶ Even the Jewish priests and scribes knew that this referred to the Messiah because they told the Roman ruler, Herod, that the prophets had foretold that the Christ should be born in Bethlehem: *'They said unto him, "In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet".'*²⁷

This long conflict between Assyria (Babylon) and God's land will continue and the battle will be fought in the land of Israel before the end comes. This is described as Armageddon when all that great Babylon stands for will finally be destroyed.²⁸

²⁶Micah 5.2-5 ²⁷Matthew 2.4-6 ²⁸Revelation 16.16



BABYLON TODAY

Our cover picture and the photograph above, is a testimony to the accuracy of Bible prophecy. We see all that is left of what is thought to be the site of one of the 'seven wonders of the world'. The above view is believed to be of the remains of the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

Truly does the Bible teach us that '... the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will'¹

¹Daniel 4.17

Muslim leaders have declared that one of their aims is the deliverance of Palestine and the hoisting of the Islamic flag over Jerusalem. In the past, the main challenge to Israel came from the north, even though Babylon and Assyria is due east. Although missiles can fly over the inhospitable desert land, forces would naturally travel via the Fertile Crescent from the north and it may well be the same again.

The Old Testament prophets require that the forces of Meshech, Tubal, Togarmah,²⁹ Ararat,³⁰ Persia³¹ and others, which seem to involve Turkey, Armenia, Iraq, Kurdistan and Iran, with possibly the Islamic states of southern Russia, to join from Libya and Sudan/Ethiopia. Ezekiel and Daniel forecast that pushing down against the '*king of the south*', this northern horde will be drawn back to be punished on the mountains of Israel and to die in Jordan.

The Lord God of Heaven has reserved the final settlement to himself and through his Son, Jesus Christ, will authorize the final onslaught. The Book of Revelation closes with the symbolic '*great Babylon*' sitting on the waters, coming into remembrance before God when the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth will be finally destroyed. In that day, all the sins and wickedness of that high tower designed at Babel will indeed have '*reached unto heaven*'.

The return of Jesus will resolve for ever the long conflict between Babylon and Jerusalem.

'Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the Lord. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. For thus saith the Lord of hosts: After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. . . . Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land and shall choose Jerusalem again.'³²

Michael Fisher
Banstead

²⁹Ezekiel 38.2,6 ³⁰Jeremiah 51.27 ³¹Ezekiel 38.5 ³²Zechariah 2.6-12

The Arab Nations

THE STATUS OF the Arab nations in the world of today presents an amazing contrast to their position in, say, the earlier decades of this century. They have become a force to be reckoned with, having prestige and financial credit on a scale that holds the recognised '*Great Powers*' in thrall.

If the question be asked: how has this extraordinary transformation come about? — the answer will spring at once to everyone's lips: OIL! The fact that the Arab world sits astride this planet's greatest known oil fields, and thus the main raw material of industrial power, has given it virtually a weapon with huge international leverage.

But oil alone is not the only, or even the main, explanation for today's Arab ascendancy.

Before coming to this, let us note the history of the area over the last seventy years or so. After the complete collapse of the Turkish Ottoman Empire following the First World War, the colonial powers, principally Britain and France, had a big hand in defining the borders of 'new' Arab lands and their monarchies, such as Iraq and what was to become the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to name but two. Humanly speaking, this was done as seemed politically expedient at the time. There was little, if any, regard for physical geography in laying down the new frontiers and it was certainly done in almost total ignorance of the vast oil wealth that lay beneath certain of those areas.

The discovery of all this '*black gold*', as it has been fittingly called, has dictated the bulk of the tension and militant posturing that we have seen, in varying degrees, from the *Maghreb* or '*Western Near East*' right across to the Persian Gulf.

Has, then, the hand of the colonial powers of Europe, albeit haphazardly, been the main factor in the Arab nations' transformation?

Again, no! We are submitting the proposition that this has come about, not by political manoeuvring but because, in the words of Scripture: 'the Most High rules in the kingdom of men. . .'¹ So, the Arabs have an important place in history and Bible

¹Daniel 4.17, 25, 32 (new King James Version) [Nelson]

prophecy. Let us go right back through history and note their origin.

Upon reading the Bible for the first time, one sooner or later comes upon lists of names, genealogies and chronologies which at first, look daunting and void of interest. With increased study the reader finds they have their important place in God's Word. Very much of the message of the true Gospel is rooted in certain outstanding parts of Old Testament history. The Apostle Paul, for example, tells us that 'the Scripture . . . preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand . . . !'²

This illustrious character Abraham, who lived about 2,000 years before the days of the Lord Jesus Christ, received a promise from the God of Heaven (later made into a covenant) which was to prove to be the distant nucleus of the Bible's message of salvation! God gave him this assurance: 'I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you . . .'³ In its historical aspect, the covenant was to be carried by the line of Abraham's descendants through his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob (Israel); thus a *Jewish* concern.

What, then, has Abraham to do with the origin of the Arabs?

Ask this question of any Bedouin of the great peninsula of Arabia and he will immediately answer, probably with pride, that Abraham is his great progenitor; that he and his myriad brethren are the sons of Abraham's son Ishmael.

THE ARABS' BEGINNING

The Bible tells us all about both Isaac and Ishmael, and the narrative is important. Ishmael was born first. Abraham (in those days called Abram) was concerned because his wife Sarai 'had borne him no children.'⁴ The narrative tells us how Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid, who was to become the mother of Ishmael, fled from the household because of the harsh treatment she was receiving from Sarai, her mistress. An angel of the Lord met her as she sat, probably in despair, by a waterspring, and told her to go back to Sarai.

Speaking through the angel, the Lord said:

'I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude . . . you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael (*meaning: God will hear*). Because the Lord has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man (*literally, a wild-ass of a man*); His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.'⁵

²Galatians 3.8 (N.K.J.V.) ³Genesis 17.7 (N.K.J.V.) ⁴Genesis 16.1 (N.K.J.V.) ⁵Genesis 16.10-12 (N.K.J.V.)

We should note these words carefully. They are Divine promises, and thus *prophecies*.

In due course Ishmael was born. Some years later, God addressed Abram and changed his name to Abraham. He reminded him of the promised covenant and assuring him that, despite her great age, Sarai (now named Sarah) would have a son, to be named Isaac and through the line of that son, the promise of the covenant would be carried. So, in the process of time, it came to pass. The genealogies of Scripture show that this line of descent goes right through Old Testament history and beyond, right to the Lord Jesus Christ through the virgin Mary. The New Testament shows us how the covenant was, in fact, the nucleus of the true Christian Gospel message! That is why we mentioned that these Bible name-lists are really very interesting *and important*.

But in the promise of the birth of Isaac, Ishmael was remembered and the prophecies about Ishmael were extended a little; the Most High said: 'Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.'⁶

Later in the Bible narrative, we have almost a repetition of the occasion when Hagar fled from her mistress; Hagar is again cast out, taking Ishmael with her; and, despairing of both her life and that of the boy, she puts him under a shrub in the Beersheba desert and weeps. Again the angel of God intervenes:

'Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation . . . So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.'⁷

The fulfilment of the promises concerning Ishmael form the basis of Arab history. In the books of Genesis and 1 Chronicles in our Bibles, we have extensive genealogies of the descendants of Abraham, and we see that Ishmael did indeed have twelve sons. Listing them, the record states: '. . . these are their names, by their towns, and by their castles; *twelve princes according to their nations*.'⁸

THE TRUE ARABS

These, then, may be regarded as the source of the 'cream' of Arab nationhood, as exemplified in the Bedouins. We say the 'cream', for it would tax the resources of the greatest historical researchers to unravel the effects of intermarriage and other ethnic complexities over the ages. There are today those claiming to be 'Arab', with probably no ethnic title to the name. Egypt, for example (which in our times has attempted to be a mouthpiece in Arab affairs) in the book of Psalms is repeatedly styled 'the land of *Ham*'.

⁶Genesis 17.20 (N.K.J.V.) ⁷Genesis 21.8-21 (N.K.J.V.) ⁸Genesis 25.16 (A.V.); also 1 Chron. 1.29-31

Some have suggested Arab roots going back to the times *before* Abraham, linked with one Joktan, brother of Abraham's great-great-great grandfather Peleg!⁹ Another view stresses an Arabic connection with Esau (Edom), the brother of Jacob, whose hostility to Israel was so often reproved in the prophetic books. It is true that there is a link between the Ishmaelites and Esau in that Esau married one of Ishmael's daughters;¹⁰ but in general, the Arab world of today can be said to reflect the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the 'twelve princes' and their offspring, with all their intermarriages.

Appropriately, the Hebrew word '*ereb*' used in our Bible for 'Arabia', means 'mixed' or 'mingled'.

Let us see, then, how history has fulfilled more of these Divine predictions.

We noted that the angel, at the first meeting with Hagar, spoke of the great spread of her descendants.⁵ The Arabs, headed up in the Bedouins, have indeed spread from the far west of the *Maghreb* to the Gulf.

Ishmael was to be 'a wild-ass' of a man.

The Most High Himself describes the habits of the onager, the wild ass of the desert!:

'Who loosed the bonds of the onager, Whose home I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwelling? He scorns the tumult of the city; He does not heed the shouts of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, And he searches after every green thing.'¹¹

How this describes the Arabs in the less organised periods of their history!: 'His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him.'⁵ *Kedar*, Ishmael's second son, appears to have well represented the warlike temperament. 'Woe is me', lamented the Psalmist, ' . . . that I dwell among the tents of Kedar! . . . when I speak, they are for war.'¹²

The devotees of the religion of Islam will tell you, that their great 'prophet', Mohammed, is descended from Kedar.

The Arabs' history has had its various fortunes, its peaks and troughs, and this is itself implied in God's promises. The 'wild-ass' aspect suggests the nomadic life, poverty, the troughs; the references to 'twelve princes' seem to indicate splendour. Amidst the Old Testament narratives, Ishmael's tribes often lapse into the backwaters; we read, for example, of 'all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed (*Heb.*: '*ereb*') multitude who dwell in the desert . . .'¹³ But in times of relative

⁹Genesis 10.25-30 ¹⁰Genesis 36.3 ¹¹Job 39.5-8 (N.K.J.V.) ¹²Psalms 120.5-7 (N.K.J.V.) ¹³Jeremiah 25.24 (N.K.J.V.)

prosperity they were evidently great traders. Of ancient Tyre, we read: 'Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your regular merchants. They traded with you in lambs, rams, and goats.'¹⁴

There are what we might term intermediate prophecies concerning them. Isaiah writes: 'For thus the Lord has said to me: "Within a year, . . . all the glory of Kedar will fail; and the remainder of the number of archers, the mighty men of the people of Kedar, will be diminished; for the Lord God of Israel has spoken it."¹⁵ Likewise Jeremiah: 'Against Kedar and against the kingdoms of Hazor which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon shall strike. Thus says the Lord: "Arise, go up to Kedar, And devastate the men of the East! Their tents and their flocks they shall take away . . ."¹⁶ These lapses in Arab prosperity came about through the 'great Powers' of ancient times, the invasions of Sargon and Nebuchadnezzar.

THE ARABIAN DECLINE

For ages afterwards the Arabs went into obscurity, at least as far as their impact on the surrounding world of the Medo-Persians, Greeks, and the early Roman Empire was concerned. They lived in idolatrous superstition and frequent mutual strife — again as prophesied.

Then, in the seventh century A.D., came an event destined to give the Arabs a dominance that was to shake the world of that time and for centuries afterwards — the rise of Islam!

The so-called 'prophet' Mohammed appeared among the wealthy merchants of Mecca, on the one hand preaching against the prevailing idolatry, demanding allegiance to One God and drawing a smattering of ethics from the Hebrew and New Testament Scriptures, but overwhelming any virtues that his philosophy might have had by a militant theology that visualised nothing less than world conquest. *Islam* means — 'surrender.'

Mohammed sent envoys to world rulers, from the Roman Heraclius to the emperor of the Tang dynasty in China, but speedily the new supposed 'Prophet' resolved upon the sword as the only means of enforcing his campaign. Neither the Byzantine (the eastern Graeco-Roman) Empire or the Sassanid Persians were able to resist the Muslim onslaught that followed. The Romans had, in fact, never regarded their territories in the Middle East as needing heavy defences. The Muslim calendar dates from the celebrated flight of Mohammed to Medina in A.D. 622; within a quarter of a century the Islamic victories included Mesopotamia and Persia, and, to the west; the great cultural centre of Alexandria in Egypt. The rest of North Africa followed, then Spain, and even part of France before the tide was eventually turned.

¹⁴Ezekiel 27.21 (N.K.J.V.) ¹⁵Isaiah 21.16,17 (N.K.J.V.) ¹⁶Jeremiah 49.28,29 (N.K.J.V.)

The Byzantine capital Constantinople itself narrowly escaped. Its fate was to await the later ascendancy of the Turks, who, along with a number of non-Arabic nations, including Persia, were to later embrace Islam.

The Belgian historian Henri Pirenne, listing apparent causes for the lack of resistance, adds that they 'are insufficient to explain so complete a triumph. The intensity of the results were out of all proportion to the numerical strength of the conquerors.'¹⁷

How true! Arab victories resulted from the unseen Hand of the Most High at work — not for the purposes supposed by the 'Prophet' of Islam, but in order that the Arabs should play their part in the great drama of Gentile times, which leads eventually to the setting up of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ!

If a devout Muslim were to be referred to the Scriptural promise of blessings upon Ishmael's posterity, he would very likely see its fulfilment in the era of splendour that followed these Arab victories, the Omayyad dynasty of caliphs (successors to Mohammed) who ruled in Damascus, the Abbasids who dominated Baghdad from the eighth to the mid-thirteenth centuries. Between them they established empires almost rivalling in power those of Babylon and Rome and gleaned a huge harvest of culture and learning from other civilisations. By the ninth and tenth centuries they engaged in paper-making. They used the numerical system that we use to-day, and many of our modern words are of Arabic origin, not only such words as 'algebra' but 'candy' (*qand*) and 'sugar' (*assokar*). The 'wisdom' of the Greece of Pericles was rivalled in the lands of the Arabs.

THE FUTURE OF THE ARABS

However, the God of Abraham has far greater things in store than human splendour when He promises blessings. There are further prophecies concerning the sons of Ishmael:

'The Lord will arise over you (*Zion*), And His glory will be seen upon you . . . All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth (*Ishmael's firstson*) shall minister to you; They shall ascend with acceptance on my altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.'¹⁸

Yes, in the day of the Kingdom of God, all the bitterness and hostility of to-day will be gone; the Arab tribes, with all the Gentiles, will know the immeasurable blessings of Divine rule. The wonderful way in which Divine Providence has overruled Arab history all down the ages, is one of the many tokens assuring us that the word of prophecy will not fail; Christ is coming; the hope of the Gospel is real and substantial. This is assured.

¹⁷"*Mohammed and Charlemagne*" (Allen & Unwin, 1954 edition) ¹⁸Isaiah 60.2,7 (N.K.J.V.)

But what of the Arabs today? Considered in relation to prophecy, this is in some respects the most fascinating and intriguing aspect of the subject. When at length the Abbasid dynasty crumbled away, Baghdad collapsed under new conquerors, and Turkish despotism under the Ottomans eroded their splendour, the Arabs lapsed again into political decadence. The First World War gave them their first real prospects of revival, by alliance with the British against the Turks who then fought on Germany's side. Our readers probably know of the exploits of 'Lawrence of Arabia' and the campaigns which sealed the fate of the Ottoman Empire.

The ejection of the Turks from Palestine, the 'Balfour Declaration' and promises of a Jewish homeland, while leading on eventually (and very positively under God's hand) to the re-establishment of the State of Israel after the European Holocaust and the Second World War — these events, we say, also opened the door to the Arab-Israeli strife which we have seen since. This, and the new Arab ascendancy resulting from the oil fields, has brought the Middle East to a new crisis potential.

It is possible that Arab power will have its part in the final onslaught that will be attempted against the land and people of Israel at the epoch of Christ's appearing. Certainly Libya, for one, is mentioned in the confederacy of Israel's latter-day enemies that Bible prophecy mentions.¹⁹

But whatever the intermediate position, we say again, the Divinely promised outcome is assured; and the history of the Arabs adds its confirmation to the truth of God's Word.

E. S. J. Mussey
Leicester

¹⁹Ezekiel 38.5



THE PROMISES OF GOD

The articles in this issue of *LIGHT* refer to the Covenant or promises that were made by God to the nations that are featured by the respective writers. The Booklet illustrated above deals with the overall matters surrounding these promises and sets out the means by which that final promise will be realized upon the earth and mankind. For your FREE copy, please write to the Correspondence Editor at the address shown on the inside of the front cover of the magazine.

The Nation — Israel

THE BIBLE is a remarkable book. Among many other things it is an encyclopaedic combination of advice, literature, instruction and history. And the way in which it deals with history is itself remarkable because, not only does the Bible give its readers the detailed history of many nations, but in many cases it does it in advance. Much of the history that can be read in the Bible was written **before** it actually took place!

There is no better example of this remarkable aspect of the Bible than the history of the Jewish people — the nation of Israel. The Bible is essentially a book about the Jewish nation, dealing with its history and its people from their earliest times to the present day and beyond. The reason is simple: God chose Israel to demonstrate to the world His power and His love for mankind. Israel were chosen to witness to the power of God:

‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.’¹

Israel is probably the most distinct and longest surviving nation on earth. The Jewish people have survived, and now flourish, despite appalling sufferings along the way and while other nations and empires have come and gone. Their history dates back more than 4,000 years to when a man named Abram (later Abraham) was called by God out of the country where he was living. God made him these promises:

‘I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’²
‘The Lord said to Abram . . . “Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring for ever”.’³

ISRAEL'S PROSPERITY

The nation that developed from Abraham did, indeed, become a great people. Their population grew, despite many problems, within a few hundred years they numbered millions. And they were given the land that God had promised them, the land known now as Israel. As they were about to enter this land, God (through their leader Moses) gave them some warnings. These contrasted what would happen to Israel if they obeyed what God had told them with what would happen if they did not.

¹Isaiah 43.10 (NIV) ²Genesis 12.2,3 (NIV) ³Genesis 13.14,15

'If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands . . . the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on the earth . . . The fruit of your womb will be blessed and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock . . . The Lord will establish you as his holy people . . . The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity . . . The Lord will make you the head, not the tail . . . you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. **However, if you do not obey the Lord your God . . .** you will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country . . . the fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land . . . the Lord will plague you with disease . . . the Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies . . . your sons and daughters will be given to another nation . . . a people that you do not know will eat what your land and labour produce and you will have nothing but cruel oppression all your days . . . you will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule . . . the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to another . . . you will find no repose . . . you will live in constant suspense . . . never sure of your life.'⁴

History shows us that everything that God promised here happened. For a while Israel was blessed in its new land but, gradually, the people began to forget about God and what He had asked them to do and turned to idolatry. The nation was split into two and, eventually, each part was invaded. In 606 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar took the people into captivity in Babylon and later returned to burn Jerusalem and its temple.

Seventy years later, those who wished were allowed to resettle the land of Israel but it was not long before the land was under Roman rule, in the days when Jesus Christ lived there. Once again the Jews rejected God and on this occasion rejected His son too. Soon afterwards, in A.D. 70, Titus the Roman sacked Jerusalem and scattered the people. After a few brief struggles, the Jews were completely banished from the land in A.D. 135 when the site of Jerusalem was ploughed up. Its territory was turned into a Roman colony and no Jew allowed in its vicinity. Many of the population were put to death and many more carried off to slavery. From then on, for more than eighteen centuries, the Jews were a people who wandered the earth like strangers, oppressed and persecuted wherever they went. The Roman emperor Constantine passed anti-Jewish statutes in the fourth century but it was the Crusades that more than anything else ushered in the worst and longest period of anti-Jewish feeling throughout the world. They were expelled from many countries, including England in 1290. They were subject to extortion and persecution wherever they lived, especially in central Europe. A new wave of anti-semitism spread through Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century resulting in the deaths of many thousands, especially in Russia. Between 1880 and 1910 at least three million Jews fled eastern Europe, many of them to the United States. These centuries of suffering culminated in the holocaust of the Second World War when, in six years, Germany put to death some six million Jews in concentration camps.

⁴*Deuteronomy 28 passim (NIV)*

PROPHECY FULFILLED

The words that God spoke through Moses thousands of years ago proved to be history written in advance. The Jewish people had rejected God and they suffered for it, suffered more than any other nation. But despite their rejection of God He did not abandon them.

When He made His warnings to them through Moses He added this:

‘Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their god. I am the Lord.’⁵

God does not and will not change. His promises to Abraham, made thousands of years earlier, remained valid. Despite their despair and calamity God preserved the descendants of Abraham:

“I am with you and will save you”, declares the Lord. “Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished”.⁶

The nations and empires at whose hands the Jews suffered — Babylon, Rome, the Third Reich and many others — exist no more but the people of Israel do. Not only do they exist but they thrive, back in their own land.

God promised this too.

“The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess”, says the Lord.⁷

‘. . . I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered . . . I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land.’⁸

ISRAEL REBORN

The end of the nineteenth century saw the first, small beginnings of a remarkable change in the fortunes of Israel. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) was led by the development of anti-semitism to publish a pamphlet **The Jewish State** in which he argued that Jews had two alternatives: assimilation by intermarriage or a separate national state. The latter course was his answer to the problem and the first Zionist Congress, held in 1897, resolved to secure for the Jewish people a legally assured home in Palestine, then a desolate part of the Turkish empire.

Little happened at first but the Zionist movement was given great impetus during the First World War when, in 1917, the British Foreign Secretary Balfour committed Britain to the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine.

⁵Leviticus 26.44,45 (NIV) ⁶Jeremiah 30.11 (NIV) ⁷Jeremiah 30.3 (NIV) ⁸Ezekiel 34.12,13 (NIV)

Balfour's declaration that

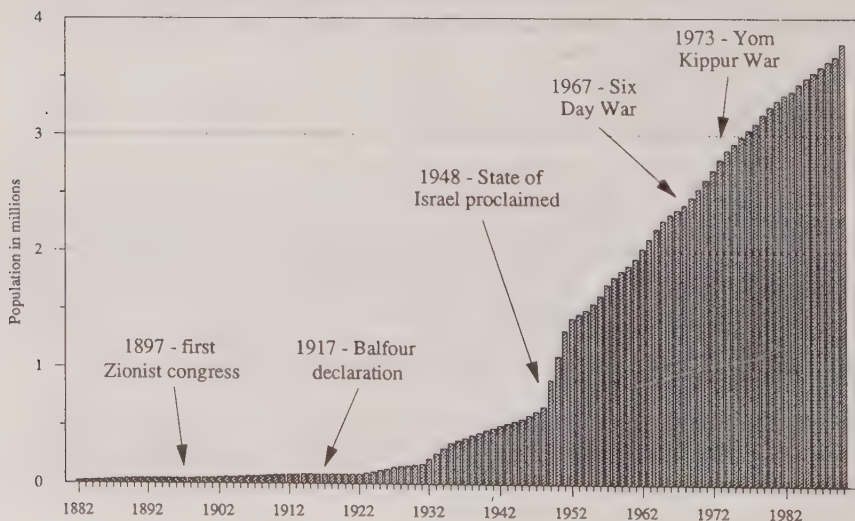
'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object . . .'

led to Britain being given the League of Nations mandate in Palestine and, as the graph shows, a steady trickle of Jews began to return to the land.

It was the holocaust of the Second World War that led far more Jews to try to return to their historic home and wave after wave of immigrants landed in Palestine. The Arabs already there were apprehensive and increasingly resistant and these and other pressures caused Britain to withdraw. On the day the British mandate was due to end, May 14 1948, the Jews proclaimed the new state of Israel.

It was widely thought that this new state could not survive. Its inhabitants were ill-equipped and surrounded by hostile Arab neighbours who went to war with them immediately. Despite the apparent imbalance in forces, Israel won. In the years which followed, as its population grew largely through Jewish immigration from all over the world, Israel not only survived but prospered. It was victorious in the Six-Day war of 1967, when it captured the whole of Jerusalem for the first time, and has survived many other attempts to destroy it, including the Yom Kippur war of 1973. Today, Israel is in many ways a successful industrial and agricultural country and nearly four million Jews live there, as the graph shows.

Jewish population of Israel from 1882 to 1983



Sources: Statistical Abstract of Israel 1952, 1964, 1988

It is impossible to deny that this is a remarkable story. Through many centuries, despite vicissitudes as great as those suffered by any nation, the nation of Israel has not perished nor has it lost its national identity. In spite of centuries of oppression, persecution and suffering the Jewish people are still a nation, a nation dwelling in the land of Israel as God had said they would thousands of years ago.

The story does not end there, however. The Jewish nation have not turned back to God; they have not yet fully accepted all that He asks of them. And the promises that God made to Abraham all those years ago have not yet all been fulfilled. There remains some more Jewish history that is still in the future. The Bible makes clear that it will happen in the near future and gives its readers a lot of detail about what will take place in and around the land of Israel.

Jesus, referring back to God's promise to Abraham that *'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you,'* said that

*'... salvation is from the Jews.'*⁹

and Paul wrote this of the people of Israel:

*'... Theirs is the adoption as sons, theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ ...'*¹⁰

The Bible shows clearly that the Jewish nation faces one last, terrible, crisis. The self-reliance that Israel has developed since 1948 will be worthless in the face of one more invasion, one final battle when the nation and, indeed, the whole world, will be on the brink of disaster. This final crisis, greater than any that has gone before (incredible though that may seem) will cause Israel to cry out to God and at last to accept His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will return to the earth as God has promised to save it from self-destruction.

*'Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.'*¹¹

*'On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child ...'*¹²

When Jesus Christ returns to the earth he will establish a world-wide kingdom of peace in which all those who follow God — whether Jew or Gentile — will be able to live for ever. And thus will all the promises that God made to Abraham finally be completely fulfilled, with everyone having an opportunity to have a part in the blessings that they will bring.

⁹John 4.22 (NIV) ¹⁰Romans 9.4,5 (NIV) ¹¹Luke 21.26,27 (NIV) ¹²Zechariah 12.9,10 (NIV)

'If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.'¹³

'And so all Israel will be saved . . . Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out!'¹⁴

God's wisdom and knowledge is illustrated in no better way than by the history of the nation of Israel, mapped out in extraordinary detail — in advance — by God and now evidence of His love and His faithfulness. The history of Israel is a sign to all who consider it that God exists, that He is in control, and that He has great things in store for those who try to follow what He has asked of them.

R. Clements
Walton

¹³*Galatians 3.29 (NIV)* ¹⁴*Romans 11.26-33 (NIV)*

